R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 010 749 RC 000 840

THE PROBLEM OF AIDING TODAY'S INDIAN TEEN AGE STUDENT TO BE PREPARED FOR TOMORROW.

BY- POEHLMAN, C.H. AND OTHERS
NEVADA STATE DEPT. OF EDUCATION, CARSON CITY

PUB DATE 64

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.28 7P.

DESCRIPTORS- *AMERICAN INDIANS, *TEENAGERS, *EDUCATION, *ENGLISH (SECOND LANGUAGE), TEACHING METHODS, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, CARSON CITY

THIS PAPER DISCUSSES PROBLEMS INVOLVED WITH TEACHING INDIAN STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS. THESE PROBLEMS ARISE FROM THE STUDENTS' LIMITED USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND FROM THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EACH OF THE INDIAN CULTURES, AS WELL AS BETWEEN INDIAN CULTURES AND AMERICAN CULTURE. METHODS FOR TEACHING THESE STUDENTS ARE ALSO SUGGESTED. (CL)

ED010749

THE PROBLEM OF AIDING TODAY'S INDIAN TEEN AGE STUDENT TO BE PREPARED FOR TOMORROW

All people in the world are in a constant process of acculturation. All cultures are changing very rapidly. None of them are static. A considerable amount of research has been and is now being done to determine the problems affecting the Indian people in this process. At present it would seem that the problems are pretty well recognized and defined. But it is most important to continue this research and follow it up with solutions which will help these people to keep from falling any farther behind other Americans in adjusting to the fantastically rapid changes which recent scientific developments have brought. So far these suggestions for solutions have not been so definite.

It is very important for teachers, guidance personnel, or any other people working with Indian people to be provided with a background of information sufficient to make them understand and be concerned with the special problems of Indian children so that they can be flexible enough to deal with them. Ordinary teacher or other specialized training does not necessarily provide this understanding and concern. Seminars and workshops are now being held at various places--some in colleges and universities as part of their summer education programs. Also, there is an increasing amount of background material available for reading. Some suggested ones are reports of anthropological studies, publications of state museums, publications of state departments of education where such research has been done, current newspapers and magazines, authentic stories depicting early Indian life, etc.

Many of the problems of the Indian teen-ager stem from the basic problems of all people; namely, ignorance and illiteracy, poverty, and disease. Possibly their greatest problem at the present time is that of under-education. They enter high school with varying backgrounds of scholastic preparation for the high school curriculum. There is no question of innate ability here, but rather a problem of determining, whatever the background, just what they are prepared to do and then provide the curriculum and, as in the case of the boarding school, the proper living environment, based on their particular needs.

Many of the students come from homes where the parents have had little or no education. Many of the parents do not participate in school or community affairs. This may result in a lack of parental interest in the students' success in school. Possibly this is responsible for the attitude of apathy many of the students seem to have toward the whole educational process. Perhaps it encourages truancy and drop-outs. If the parents have not accepted western culture, a home-school conflict is created within students. Dr. Warren d'Azevedo says that the students know what is expected by their present society--but the same is not true at home. Thus there is this conflict between directions. This develops the stubbornness which is often apparent, which is not basic to Indian nature but has been forced upon them by this situation. Many of them have acquired an enmity towards schools and non-Indians in general.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

RC 000 840

Many of them are economically dependent on the government for their basic needs. They have come to feel it is a right. So the students have no incentive to prepare to earn a living. Many of them have no sense of pride in their cultural heritage. And many traditional academic programs aggravate these things.

An understanding that cultural differences do exist both between Indians and non-Indians and between Indians of different tribes, and that these differences do have a profound effect on the students' progress in school, and after, should help those working with Indina students to know how to create an atmosphere of ease, happiness, friendliness and appreciation; or, as Dr. Y. T. Witherspoon expressed it, establish a milieu in which children feel free to learn. This is important because Indian children are very sensitive and very keen judges of whether or not a person is friendly, patient or interested.

Some general advice which might be helpful to those working with Indian teenagers for the first time might be as follows: First of all, do not be too aggressive at the start. Take your time. Do not overdo praise--it makes them feel conspicuous which is contrary to their home training. They do not want to be singled out for special attention. And, always remember that, as Dr. T. Y. Witherspoon says, "Indian children have to unlearn before they can learn, and catch up and keep up."

Human motive and incentive moves the world. Indian teenagers, just as any other teenagers, need the motivation to think about the problems that should concern them, to contribute to their solution, to evaluate the outcome of their participation. Dr. Omer Stewart says that teachers have to realize that Indian students have been given a lot of experience in failing and may have developed a concept that they are going to fail all their lives, so why should they try?

Just learning to think about and manage their own affairs in their high school situation is a start. This learning needs to be something more than verbal. Mastery of simple situations such as dining room, any extra-curricular things, possibly some part-time work for which they receive pay which they can learn to manage--anything which inspires confidence in their ability to do is a step toward the ultimate goal. In addition, they need the training to do the things needed to develop and maintain their integrity and self-respect.

It is important that Indian teenagers of all tribes be encouraged and helped to preserve and improve and even to learn more about their own cultural heritage, for which they should have great pride, as a contribution to modern society. They should understand that the schools are not trying to erase that. This should contribute to their own happiness and well-being.

Man cannot think at all without language. Each language promotes a particular pattern of thought, as pointed out by Dr. Sven Liljeblad. There are three hundred or more Indian languages, many of them still in use in small groups as the only language spoken and understood. Many teen-age

Indian students are still struggling with the problem of trying to communicate successfully, which is one of the important assets in life. "As the language barrier is demolished, to the same extent will the amalgamation of the Indian children . . . into the dominant non-Indian society be hastened."[1]

Speech difficulties in a school which is inter-tribal will not fall into a definite Indian pattern. There are some sounds in English which do not appear in Indian languages. In some Indian languages there is no distinction of gender; in some there are neither definite or indefinite articles, and many or all Indian languages produce a glottal stop which is not present in English.

Indian adolescents are very sensitive and may have a fear, in fact, almost a phobia, that someone will make fun of them if they speak incorrectly. This is a direct result of their own cultural background in which shame or ridicule was used as a means of discipline. Mamie Sizemore says that anyone learning a second language usually understands more than he can speak or write. She advises teachers not to be overly concerned about Indian students' imperfect English speech. Older Indian students should be given specific help, but they will correct many of their own faults by conscious or unconscious imitation of the English pattern. Teachers and guidance people should strive to create an environment that will provide an opportunity for speech improvement. They should guard against any experiences that will make them withdraw from oral discussions. An unconscious fear of mistakes could lead to a rejection of the new language which could completely block the acculturation process.

Many Indians are still using English as a second language when they enter high school. Therefore, there is a possibility that they do not understand everything that is said in a classroom. And, they may have an inability to relate ideas in both languages with facility. Indians cannot read and write in their own language, so it is quite possible that they will have difficulty in reading and writing the language they are expected to use in school.

Teachers and guidance people must try to have an understanding of the part that language barrier plays in the school life of the student. Does it help to produce the apathy, reluctance to participate orally, discipline problems, lack of attention, poor study habits, drop-out problem, etc., that are recognized as problems of Indian children in our schools?

The following are some suggested activities which might be of help in the encouragement of oral participation by students:

1. Use of the packet of materials containing games and teaching aids having to do with the use of the telephone, which is

1. Sizemore, Mamie, Oral English After the First Grade, State Department of Public Instruction, Div. of Indian Educ., Phoenix, Arizona, (foreword)

available from local telephone company business offices. Possibly a Teletrainer can be borrowed from the telephone office.

2. Have students take turns teaching games, preparing exhibits or bulletin boards and give class talks on related ideas or experiences.

3. Use of films and discussion of them

4. Read in chorus.

5. Quiz shows--students preparing and asking questions and students answering questions.

6. Group planning of class projects and presentation of them.

7. Field trips, with class members prepared to ask questions, perhaps interview someone.

8. Invite resource persons to class and have students prepare topics of inquiry before they arrive. Have students act as hosts.

9. Simulate interview situations; i.e. job interviews.

10. Use of tape recorder.

Those people working with the Indian teen-ager must have an understanding of the difficulties those of another culture have in attempting to enter another culture--whether by choice or by force. Consideration must be given to the attitude of the culture the Indian teen-ager is expected to enter. There is a direct problem of integration, inter-tribal, as well as integration of all races. The teen ager may have to be made aware that he may come face to face with instances of racial discrimination or inter tribal discrimination for the first time. All of a sudden he may realize that dating is a problem, for instance. It cannot be denied that the dominant culture has not yet educated itself to the point of overcoming all unfavorable attitudes toward all Indians, as well as other minority groups. Sometimes it seems that they are accepted, but on a low level.

There is a lack of attempt on the part of educators, guidance people, etc., to give students an understanding of the reasons for what they are expected to do. This may be caused by one of two things. Either they do not have sufficient knowledge of the problems and cultural backgrounds which make this careful guidance necessary, or there is not sufficient time allotted to them for attention to this matter. According to Pedro T. Orata, teachers need time constantly to think through these problems and plan their work so as to handle them. "Five hours for actual teaching and three hours for thinking and planning is not an unbalanced budget for teacher thinking." [3]

3. Orata, Pedro T. Fundamental Education In An Amerindian Community, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Feb. 1953, page 23.

There are many different tribes--each with its own attitude about the importance of higher education. It is important for teachers and guidance personnel to have a knowledge of what various Indian tribes are doing in the area of Indian Education, what they plan to do and what they believe should be done.

Perhaps this bit of Indian philosophy says a whole lot as a summary of what we want to say.

"Fear Knocked at the Door

Faith answered

No One Was There."

This article was made possible by the efforts of a number of graduate students who attended a seminar on Problems In Indian Education held during the summer of 1964 at the University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada.

C. H. Poehlman
Supervisor, Indian Education